

Text, Principle and Method: A Study on the Different Texts of the Chapter “Zeng Xi Yan Zhi” on Haihunhou Slips

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Abstract: In the “Analects of Confucius” unearthed from the tomb of Liu He, Marquis of Haihun in the Western Han Dynasty, Mr. Chen Kanli interpreted the chapter “Zeng Xi’s Statement on the Zhi” as “praising Yi, satirizing Wu, pouring and feeding”, and interpreted Zeng Xi’s ambition as a ritual of offering sacrifices to pray for rain, thus questioning the “popular nature” and “Yao and Shun atmosphere” theories of Song Confucianism. Chen Wen’s interpretation of the text is quite original, and it better solves the difficulties in the traditional interpretation of “Late Spring Bathing Water” and provides a new textual basis for re-understanding Zeng Xi’s ambition; however, the focus of his argument is mainly on the context of the Han Dynasty reflected in the unearthed documents, and relatively little attention is paid to the ideological and historical significance of the interpretation of the doctrines of Song Confucianism. Zeng Xizhi’s multiple interpretations not only reflect the openness of the text of The Analects itself, but also reflect the evolution of the interpretation of Confucian classics in different historical periods.

Keywords: Haihun Hou’s slips; Zeng Xi’s statement; variations of “The Analects”; classical interpretation; unearthed documents.

1. Raising the Question

“The Analects of Confucius·Advanced”Zhang Zengxi’s phrase“Bath in Yi, dancing in the wind, chanting and returning”has always been the focus of the history of interpretation of Confucian classics. Confucius’exclamation of“I and Dianye”became an important basis for later generations of Confucians to infer the demeanor of sages. However, commentators of all ages have been debating whether the word “bath”is reasonable in late spring and what the meaning of“wind”is. Zhao Yi of the Qing Dynasty pointed out:“The theory of‘bathing in Yi’has been explained several times since the Han Dynasty.”[1]

The *Analects of Confucius* slips unearthed from the tomb of Haihunhou Liu He in Nanchang in 2011 provide a new documentary basis.According to the collation report published by the Jiangxi Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and other collaborating institutions, over 500 bamboo slips of the Analects were unearthed from the tomb. Each slip contains approximately 24 characters, with diagonal scratches on the reverse side, and the calligraphic style is solemn and elegant.[2] Among them,“Zeng Xi Yan Zhi”has a total of 24 characters, complete from beginning to end. Mr. Chen Kanli interpreted it as “Six or seven boys, praising Yi, satirizing Wu and Wu, pouring out feedback.”[4]

“Rong Hu Jin”in this slip corresponds to“Yu Hu Yi”in the current version,“Feng Hu Wu Yu”corresponds to“Feng Hu Wu Yu”,“Chang Er Kui”corresponds to“Yong Er Gui”, and the three different texts are used simultaneously. Based on this, Chen Kanli believed that Zeng Xi’s ambition was to preside over the ceremony of praying for rain, which was far from the interpretation of the realm of Song Confucianism as “the chest is leisurely, and the flow of all things in the world” [4].Is this judgment valid? I secretly think that it still needs to be carefully analyzed from three levels: text interpretation, theoretical interpretation and methodology.

2. Gains and Losses in Interpretation: The Rationality of Changing From “Bath” to “Song”

Chen Wen’s primary contribution to text interpretation was to read“Rong Hu Jin”as“Song Hu Yi”.The two words “rong”and“song”are commonly used in ancient books, and Duan Yucai has discussed them in detail[5].“Rong”in the ancient Chinese text *Shuowen* derives its sound from“Gong”,which has the same sound symbol as“Song”,so there is no obstacle in the sound theory of Tongjie. More importantly, this reading method solves the“late spring bath water”confusion that has troubled commentators of all ages. Regarding this, Wang Chong of the Eastern Han Dynasty has already questioned: “In the fourth month of the Zhou Dynasty, it is also the second month of the first year. It is still cold,...how can I take a bath and dry myself? ”[6] “Wind Hu Wu Yu”reads“wind”as“sarcastic”, which is not Chen Wen’s first creation. Wang Chong’s “Lunheng Mingyu Chapter” already said: “Wind is also a song. ”[6]Zhong Changtong also said that“it is satirical under the dancing nun”[7].Interpreting “wind”as satirical recitation, and“song”are both matters of sound education, and the literary style is consistent.

The most innovative thing is to read“Chang Er Kui”as“Pang Er Ku”.The character“Chang”in the simplified text comes from“water”on the left and“bing”on the right.Chen Wen said that “peng is read as Peng, which refers to the appearance of abundant rain.”Zheng Xuan’s note clearly stated: “It is also a gift of wine and food. ‘Fei’ in the Lu reading is ‘gui’, which is from ancient times.”[8]It can be seen that there were different readings in the Han Dynasty. The simplified version is“Kui”, which is a variant of“gui”,which is consistent with the “Lu reading”.Chen Wen takes“feed”instead of“return”, which is consistent with Zheng Xuan’s view of “from ancient times”.

However, although Chen Wen’s interpretation is reasonable

in terms of the glyphs, it is not entirely debatable.

The character “Chang” is pronounced as “Pang”. Although the phonetic argument is sound, but when examining the actual usage of the character “Pang” in the literature of the Han Dynasty, it becomes doubtful. *Shuowen Jiezi* explains “Pang” as “Pei”. From water, the sound is “Bang”. Chen Xuan and others said: ‘Nowadays, it is customary to call it Pei Pei, which is not true.’ Pu Langqie.” [9], the paragraph’s note says that its original meaning is “water flowing”. Check *The Book of Songs·Xiaoya·Chuangzhishi*: “The moon has left at the end of the day, and the rain is pouring.” Mao Chuan interpreted “pangtuo” as “heavy rain” [10]; *Chen Feng* also has the sentence “tears pouring down” [11], which is used to describe the abundance of tears. Down to the Han Dynasty, “Selected Works (*Sima Xiangru*) *Shanglin Fu* ‘peng bi hang gai’, the note quoted Sima Biao said: ‘peng bi, the sound of water.’” [12] “Sima Xiangru’s *Ode to Shanglin* describes the sound of the impact of water flow with ‘peng bi hang gai’.

Looking at these usage examples, the word “pang” in the Han Dynasty literature may refer to heavy rain, or to describe the gushing water, or to describe the flow of tears. Its semantic field has always been centered around the core image of “grand water”, and has not been directly used in the specific ritual context of “rainfall after praying for rain”. Although Chen Wen introduced “Pang” into the interpretation of Yu sacrifice on the basis of Yinli Tongji, he failed to provide rhetorical support that the word was directly related to Yu sacrifice ceremony in the Han Dynasty. In other words, between “it can be deduced” and “it should be interpreted in this way”, there is still a gap in the argument that requires documentary evidence, and Chen’s article is missing this gap. Mr. Wudaofang has pointed out that although sinologists in the Qing Dynasty such as Song Xiangfeng, Liu Baonan and others made their own inventions in researching this chapter, “everyone has different opinions and disputes with each other, so they cannot reach completely consistent conclusions” [13]. From this point of view, although Chen Wen’s interpretation has strong explanatory power in terms of textual exegesis and phonological interpretation, there is still room for further supplementary documentary evidence in the relevant arguments, and its conclusion should be regarded as an enlightening new explanation rather than a final conclusion.

From the perspective of philology, the key to whether the “rong” in “Rong almost near” in Haihunhou’s bamboo slips should be read as “song” lies in the examination of the glyph system and the custom of passing falsehoods. In the bamboo slips of the Warring States, Qin and Han Dynasties, the phenomenon of using the same voice as a false one is relatively common, so there is no obstacle to the connection of “rong” and “song” in terms of music theory. However, the establishment of a pass-fake relationship still needs to be judged based on the specific context. If we follow the traditional saying of “bathing in Yi”, the emphasis is on depicting late spring recreation scenes; if we follow the saying of “singing on Yi”, the emphasis is on ceremonial activities and poetry reciting. The two reflect different directions of text understanding, and also reflect possible differences between the Han Dynasty versions of *The Analects*.

3. Debate Between Principles and Principles: There Is No Necessary Opposition Between Han and Song Dynasties

Mr. Chen Kanli interpreted Zeng Xi’s interpretation of the simplified version as “presiding over the sacrifices to pray for rain”, and pointed out that this was “very different” from the interpretations of Song scholars such as Cheng Hao, Zhu Xi and others [3]. Reading through the Chen article, although its wording does not directly accuse Song Confucianism of being “empty”, it does quote scholars since the Qing Dynasty who have “gone over the top” and Qian Mu’s statement that “has lost the original purpose of the *Analects*”, and placed it in the context of “now we know”. It is not difficult to see that Chen Wen prefers to emphasize the Han Dynasty classics tradition reflected in the interpretation of the simplified version, and there is relatively little discussion of the historical significance of ideas elucidated by Song Confucianism. However, the interpretation of the simplified version and the interpretation of Song Confucianism may have been parallel in the world, but they may not be determined by one person.

Judging from the reason for Confucius’s “and point”, if according to Chen’s explanation, Zeng Xi’s ambition was to pray for rain for the country by offering sacrifices to pray for rain, then why did Confucius “sigh” about it alone? The explanation given by Chen Wen is: because this answer is “more plain and relevant” and “is in line with Confucius’s proposition of ‘serving the country with propriety’ later in this chapter” [14]. Although this explanation is self-contained in terms of textual exegesis, it also brings new problems.

In the “Sitting” chapter of *The Analects of Confucius·Advanced*, Confucius’s responses to the first three disciples were “sneered at it” (to Zilu) and silence (to Ran You and Gong Xihua), but he only “sighed” to Zeng Xi. This “sigh” is not an ordinary interjection. After sorting out the two thousand years of interpretation history of the “Sitting” chapter, Wudaofang pointed out that commentators in the past dynasties—from modern writers, ancient writers, metaphysicians in the Han and Tang Dynasties, to Neo-Confucianists in the Song and Ming Dynasties, and then to sinologists in the Qing Dynasty—although the specific interpretation of Zeng Xizhi’s aspirations included spring outing, praying for rain, seclusion, and attaining the Taoist sages, they all regarded Confucius’s “sighing” as the core element for understanding this chapter, and thus launched their respective systems of doctrine construction [13]. In other words, “sighing” has always been a keyword carrying special weight in the history of classics interpretation, and its meaning cannot be exhausted in a certain era. Fu Maoxu also divided “Confucius’s sighs” into three types based on emotional expression: exclamation, admiration and lamentation. He believed that its emergence was closely related to the social background of “the collapse of rituals and music” in the Spring and Autumn Period. Confucius’s sighs throughout his life mostly reflected his deep thoughts on the impossibility of promoting the ideal of kingship [3]. It can be said that “sighing” is an expression that carries special emotional weight in Confucius’s discourse system.

So, could a rain praying ceremony, which Chen Wen characterized as “plain and relevant”, trigger such a deep sigh from Confucius? If it was just because Zeng Xi’s answer was “in line with ‘serving the country with etiquette’”, then why

didn't Confucius sigh like this when it came to Zi Lu, Ran You, and Gong Xihua's ambitions, which were also in line with etiquette? Of course, as a national ceremony to pray for rain, the solemnity and practical concerns of the Ouji sacrifice may also trigger Confucius's sigh, which cannot be completely ruled out. As Wudaofang pointed out after sorting out the interpretations of the past generations: "The characteristics of the writing of *The Analects of Confucius* make it possible to interpret polysemy, and this polysemy is the true state of acceptance of *The Analects of Confucius*." [13] Even if a certain interpretation is deemed to be a "misreading" in terms of exegesis, it may still play a positive role in the intellectual history of later generations - this is the openness of the classics that makes them classics. Chen Wen's explanation of Zeng Xi's ambitions through the sacrifice of Yu is a system of its own in exegesis. However, if Confucius's sigh of "sighing" is completely understood as an approval of the rain praying ceremony itself, it may not be enough to fully explain the rich emotional connotation of the word "sighing" in the context of *The Analects* and the ideological significance it carries in the interpretive tradition of the past dynasties. Therefore, while acknowledging the possibility of interpretation of Yuji, it is still necessary to conduct a comprehensive investigation based on Confucian value ideals and interpretive traditions.

4. Methodological Reflection: Unearthed Documents and Handed Down Documents

It should be pointed out that although the Haihun Hou Slips are older, they still belong to a copy form in the dissemination process of *The Analects of Confucius*. Being unearthed earlier does not necessarily mean that it is closer to the original text. Therefore, its academic value mainly lies in providing new evidence and observation perspectives, rather than directly replacing the handed down text. Regarding the relationship between unearthed documents and handed down documents, the principles of careful comparison and comprehensive investigation should still be adhered to. According to the compilation report, this "Analects of Confucius" belongs to the "Qi Lun" system and is directly related to Liu He's apprenticeship with Wang Ji during the Changyi King period. As a manuscript from the mid-Western Han Dynasty, its text form is earlier than the annotated version of Zheng Xuan of the Eastern Han Dynasty and He Yan's "Jijie" of the Three Kingdoms. It has irreplaceable value for studying the early spread of *The Analects of Confucius*.

However, the determination of value and the application of methods need to be treated differently. In the study of unearthed documents, there is sometimes a tendency to regard the unearthed documents as right and the handed down documents as wrong if they are different from the documents handed down from ancient times. Mr. Guo Weitao has an incisive analysis on this: "The consistency between unearthed documents and handed down documents does not mean that they are necessarily historical facts; the discrepancy between unearthed documents and handed down documents does not mean that handed down documents are necessarily wrong." He divided the "double evidence method" into Wang Guowei's version and Chen Yinke's version, pointing out that Wang Guowei's original intention was to "do not give in to the old to make way for the new, nor to accept the new but to make use of the old." [14]

From the perspective of interpretive history, the so-called

interpretation of "offering sacrifices to pray for rain" was not the first time it appeared after the Haihunhou Slips were unearthed. Wudaofang has systematically combed and pointed out that this theory originally existed in the ancient classics tradition of the Han Dynasty, but it was gradually disappeared from the Song and Yuan Dynasties [13]. Chen Wen's contribution is to prove with physical evidence that this interpretation did exist in the Han Dynasty, but this does not negate the realm theory developed by Song Confucianism on this basis. As Wudaofang said: "Chinese studies emphasize empirical evidence but fail to be rigid; Song studies have subtle meanings but fail to over-explain. The characteristics of the writing of *The Analects of Confucius* make it possible to interpret polysemy, and this polysemy is the true state of acceptance of the Analects." [13]

From the perspective of the methodology of unearthed document research, we cannot easily use the unearthed version to negate the interpretation tradition of the handed down version. As Cao Feng said: "Due to the limitations of unearthed documents themselves and the complexity of research on unearthed documents, the role they can play is limited. Without long-term and arduous text collation and restoration, unearthed documents cannot be easily used to rewrite the history of Chinese thought." [15] He also specifically pointed out that "there are similarities in the research methods of unearthed documents and handed down documents, and traditional research ideas and methods should not be easily dismissed". Guo Weitao further pointed out that unearthed documents and handed down documents are "just a simple term, referring to the external form of the materials and have nothing to do with the value of their contents in the sense of historical materials." The two should be examined equally at the same level.

The Analects of Confucius is a classic because it can accommodate understanding and interpretation from different eras. Unearthed documents can enrich our understanding of handed down documents and can mutually corroborate handed down documents, but they should not be the only basis for denying the existing interpretation history.

5. Conclusion

The variant texts of the chapter "Zeng Xi Yan Zhi" on the Haihun Marquis Slips provide precious materials for understanding the diversity of the text of *The Analects of Confucius* in the Han Dynasty. Chen Wen read "Rong Hu Jin" as "Song Hu Yi", which provides a new way of explaining the issue of "Late Spring Bathing Water". However, the pronunciation of the word "Hui" as "Pang" lacks direct lexical support. This theory can be used by one family, but cannot be concluded immediately. More importantly, Chen Wen juxtaposed the interpretation of the simplified version with the interpretation of Song Confucianism, revealing the multiple interpretation paths of the Analects in different historical periods. This contribution deserves recognition.

However, richness of text does not equal unity of meaning. Zeng Xizhi's ambition can be understood in the historical context of the ritual system and sacrifice culture of the Han Dynasty, or it can be explained from the perspective of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, which focused on personality realm and spiritual pursuit. Although the two interpretation paths have different emphases, they respectively reflect the interpretation of the textual meaning of "The Analects" by scholars in different eras. The two are not a simple oppositional relationship, but a concrete

manifestation of the classics' continuous acquisition of new vitality.

In this regard, the inspiration of Haihun Hou's Slips may not only be that it provides "another way of reading", but also reminds us that the vitality of classics comes precisely from the process of its constant questioning and re-interpretation in different eras. The significance of unearthed documents is not to end this conversation, but to continue it in a richer way.

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